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MXGP SERIES KICKS OFF IN QATAR...



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FEATURES

032: MXGP

NEWS, VIEWS, EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEWS AND MORE AS THE MX WORLD CHAMPS BUZZ INTO LIFE

040: ZACH OSBORNE

THE GEICO HONDA STAR TELLS IT LIKE IT IS

052: ANTOINE MEO

THE FOUR-TIME EWC CHAMP TALKS ABOUT HIS MOVE TO E2 AND HIS DAKAR DESIRES

058: TM 300 TEST

ED BRADLEY GETS TO GRIPS WITH TM'S 300CC TWO-SMOKER

064: JASON DOUGAN

DOING IT DOOGIE STYLE WITH THE MVR-D HONDA STAR

072: SUPERENDURO

WHAT WENT DOWN IN THE SUPERENDURO WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS

076: KEN ROCZEN

WHY KTM'S ROOKIE IS THE REAL DEAL

086: AMERICAN HONDA

BEHIND THE SCENES WITH AMERICAN HONDA'S FACTORY SX SQUAD

102: HAWKSTONE

WHAT THE HAWKSTONE INTERNATIONAL CAN TEACH US ABOUT THE SEASON AHEAD

108: HELL'S GATE

THE HARD ENDURO SEASON KICKS OFF WITH AN EVENT THAT'S SO TOUGH ONLY TWO MAKE IT TO THE FINISH

114: ARENACROSS

THE GARMIN ARENACROSS TOUR REACHES A CLIMAX WITH RACES IN NEWCASTLE, SHEFFIELD AND LONDON

REGULARS

022: NEWS

A LOVELY COLLECTION OF OFF-ROAD NEWS AND GOSSIP

026: STUFF

A COLLECTION OF SWEET DIRT BIKIN' SWAG

048: BURNICLE'S BEAT

CELEBRATING 30 YEARS OF THE BERCY SX

094: DR DIRT

MEASURING STUFF WITH CALIPERS AND SH*T

096: DBR TESTED

DARE YOU LOOK AT TWO BIKES ONE ED BRADLEY?

100: PROJECT DBR 500F

FIGURING OUT THE DBR500F'S CHASSIS

129: RAGE

THE UK'S #1 READ FOR YOUNG GUNS

134: HOT WHEELS

RYAN DUNGEY'S RACE BIKE



ON THE COVER:
QATAR HERO MAX ANSTIE
ON THE GAS AT LOSAIL
© BAVO SWIJGERS

CONTENTS:
JAKE NICHOLLS ON HIS
WAY TO MXGP POINTS
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CONTENTS

★ ELECTRIC ★

START!

NEWS, VIEWS, EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEWS AND MORE
AS THE FIM MOTOCROSS WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP BUZZES
INTO LIFE UNDER LIGHTS...

Words by Adam Wheeler Photos by Ray Archer

By the time you read this two of the first three flyaways in the FIM Motocross World Championship will have been power-washed from the schedule. We're actually scribbling this from the departures hall of Doha airport in Qatar while riders tweet pictures of themselves sunning away roost grazes by various swimming pools in Thailand.

Who knows what Si Racha will bring? Last year we had a biblical rain shower – in just 15 minutes – and the biggest and meanest double-jump on the calendar...not to mention all that suffocating humidity. Two from 18 rounds will be in the bag as the factory bikes continue their bounce around the continents and head directly in crates straight to Brazil before they get familiar with the confines of a race truck for the majority of the 2014 fixture list.

I write 18 rounds but the likelihood is that the series will again be chopped to 17. It is extremely hard to see how MXGP can cross any of the borders into the Ukraine in August and although Youthstream publicly tackled the issue in Qatar by exacting a two month 'freezing' period on the race to see if the serious political upheaval calms down – it is not looking pretty. That's for the nation as a whole, nevermind the minuscule prospect of a motocross community rolling into town.

A summer break would be welcome and is a phase present in practically all other motorsports. A lull in the calendar around the Ukraine date (August 17) would be particularly suitable for the three UK teams who have to head from Scotland for the British championship the previous week across the breadth of Europe. "It's around 3000 miles!" said STR KTM owner Steve Turner. Youthstream have already spoken about substituting the race but if this happens then it will be with an established circuit and club; someone with the capabilities to get set-up for an event in just two months.

Although not technically a 'flyaway' the removal of the Ukraine from the

MXGP picture removes a bit more of that cosmopolitan gloss. The championship has already staked its claim for global reach with Qatar, Thailand and Brazil off the bat. Tripping around the globe is pricey and one of the reasons why the Officially Approved Team list (OAT) is slimming down and the gate is narrowing also.

It is a situation that will reach a crescendo in a period of months and weeks when around nine high profile MX2 athletes look at deals and need to find a place in MXGP. If no other teams emerge or the 23 year rule is not shifted then it will almost certainly be a situation of survival of the fittest or the brightest and the margin for a rider's development in Grand Prix gets ever shorter.

Again, other motorsports have a permanent entry list, so no huge differentiation compared to the rest of the top level racing landscape but it is all in a bit of an evolutionary rush for MX. Better TV and arguably more exposure than ever before thanks to broadcast deals in Asia, America and Europe could see a turnaround in a team's potential to grab dwindling sponsors or increase current deals but it might come too late for the current generation of riders on the tipping point of MX2.

While this background to the sport looms, the actual physical act of travelling and racing abroad is heartily welcomed. There is something liberating about the distance for riders – almost a degree less of pressure compared to the bustle of European or home events.

You can also see how different nationalities and cultures embrace motocross. The fans are simply bananas in Brazil and the ritual haggling over riding kit in the paddock after the Grand Prix has now become a fun petty-cash money-maker for the stars. The weather, tracks and terrain are somehow a bit 'different' and coupled with the setting and the atmosphere it all makes for a special 'flavour' to the FIM Motocross World Championship.

You will struggle to find one rider who will

voice against voyaging afar to compete. It is part of the fun of the job and also the exclusivity. Motocross GP racers rarely get rich to retire so it is one of the perks to be enjoyed. The international scope of the FIM series is also one of the factors – maybe the biggest – that can trump the AMA Pro Nationals in terms of allure.

Not all of the locations are mint. Russia remains a blot and there weren't any sad reactions to the news that the benefactor behind Semigorie in 2012 had gone AWOL when it came to renegotiation for 2013...the only shame about missing out on Russia was the sheer volume of people who came to the Grand Prix – it was absolutely rammed and that audience potential remains untapped.

For the second year in a row the Qatar and Thailand double kicked things off. The people of Doha are almost as fast as the road racers and motocrossers that come to Losail. The capital city is in a hurry and quickly. In eight years the World Cup comes to town and it was something of a shock to see the illuminated sign by the scaffolded colossus of a football stadium being built next to the Losail circuit saying 'just 224 days' until opening. Qatar feels like being on a building site. There must be as many cranes and cement trucks as people.

So, it was not much of a surprise to learn that the work on the revamped motocross track (in terms of lighting and all-round prep) can be measured in days instead of months. Track builder Justin Barclay pointed at to his watering team during the qualification heats on Friday night and it was amazing to see a group of almost 20 workers waiting for his instruction to turn on the hoses. It was a typical example of the resources on offer.

You'll know by now that Gautier Paulin, Jeffrey Herlings and Aussie Meghan Rutledge ran out as winners in a tense opener under the lights. As Thailand beckons the MXGP and MX2 stories will continue and by the time European soil dries or thaws for Grand Prix then we'll really be in the mix.



Gautier Paulin takes an early lead in the MXGP class

OSBORNE UNCUT

HAVING BEEN THERE AND DONE PRETTY MUCH EVERYTHING,
GEICO HONDA'S ZACH OSBORNE HAS A VALID OPINION
ON MOST THINGS AND HE'S NOT AFRAID TO SHARE IT...

Words by Adam Wheeler Photos by Ray Archer

An interview can often be a step into a void. Even if you know the subject then the circumstances, timing, mood and surroundings can dictate what and how a particular person wants to talk about themselves or a specific situation. I've gone into interviews expecting little and walking out with an MP3 recorder full of tasty material. Likewise some have swung in the other direction and a usually engaging talker has felt decidedly monosyllabic – the timing was wrong.

Focusing on motocross and there are typically a bank of riders and personalities that make for good copy. The likes of Joel Smets, Stefan Everts, Pit Beirer are always liberal with their thoughts. Get Mickael Pichon in a chatty mood and he also won't hold back. Shaun Simpson is articulate as is Gautier Paulin. And some you really have to work with. Clement Desalle took some time to feel confident with his English and holds a degree of mistrust with journalists generally after a bad experience being allegedly misquoted in the Belgian press pages) as a youngster. Tony Cairoli is a frank interviewee and usually won't talk more than he has to – sometimes you get the feeling

he is 'interviewed out' which has to be kinda normal for the most in-demand racer in Grand Prix.

Over in the AMA? Not easy. We are talking MotoGP-style of gaining access to athletes although some of them can make good copy and there isn't the language barrier with a big percentage of the GP fraternity speaking to the press in their second tongue. James Stewart has a good sense of humour, Ryan Villopoto has the same but is very dry. Ryan Dungey is extremely humble and an honest talker. Justin Barcia and Trey Canard also good company for press duties. Ken Roczen tends to chat in sound-bites – perhaps the German is a fine example of the 'video generation' where answers are quick, snappy and largely complimentary.

So what of Zach Osborne? Thanks to his five year Grand Prix stint we've read plenty about the 24 year old. Even though he's been off the world championship scene for over 18 months the new '16' has a widened and somewhat unique view on the sport that also involves his ventures into Enduro and ISDE participation.

We planned to meet with Zach for a catch-up prior to Anaheim 3 and the fifth round of the West Coast 250SX series where he had already taken two podiums but has been a distant pursuer to the likes of Jason Anderson, Cole Seely and the speed of Dean Wilson. In practice at A3 Osborne would fall

and re-break the troublesome collarbone that wrecked his last GP term in 2012 with the Dixon Yamaha crew. So we postpone to San Diego where Zach is still in attendance fulfilling promotional duties for Honda and for Geico.

Zach is another of those racers that can say a lot without saying much but can easily be provoked into speaking his mind with abandon. At least twice during our chat – within the unnerving shiny interiors of the Geico truck – Osborne says something along the lines of 'no, don't you dare print that'.

We already know quite a lot about the Virginian so the purpose of today's visit (the photoshoot had been done the previous evening with Ray Archer at a San Diego dealer event) was to throw a couple of questions in to kick things off and see how the conversation progresses. Instead of the usual manicured Q+A here are the 'Osborne Tapes' – an exercise in a slightly more revealing interview process.

We sit down at a table in the office of the Geico race truck. Noisy air conditioning whirs, the TV is on and outside many people – team staff and guests – are tucking into a full buffet of Mexican food. Osborne is completing an interview with French website LeBig so we wait and finally grab a seat on the sofa while the American reclines in an office chair, arm in a sling and holding our voice recorder like a microphone – obviously





DOOGIE STYLE!

MVR-D HONDA'S JASON DOUGAN ON RACING, INJURIES, TATTOOS AND LIVING WITH THE BOSS...

Words by Jeff Perrett Photos by Nuno Laranjeira

Jason 'Doogie' Dougan is the youngest ever winner of a Maxxis British championship round. That was back in 2003 when he was still at school. Since then Doogie hasn't quite lived up to the obvious potential but that hasn't been for lack of effort – the dice just hasn't rolled like he would've hoped.

The shy, introvert Dougan is the man many see at the races but away from that and the more you get to know him, you soon realise he's a fruit and nut case, full of quick witted humour and sharply sarcastic. With the clock starting to tick a little faster on his motocross career are we going to see Doogie back winning at the sharp end and more of his fun side? Let's find out what he thinks about that amongst other things.

DBR: So Doogie, you've just turned 27. Do you feel like a more grown up, rounded person these days?

JD: "Mmm....in general, yeah I do but I'm still the same person I have been personality wise for the past 10 years."

DBR: Oh dear lord, really? Well let's talk about this personality of yours. For those of us who have gotten to know you, we all know that you can be a bit of a nutball with a wacky sense of humour but a lot of

people don't know you as that guy at all because in the public eye you appear to be really quiet and shy. What's the deal there?

JD: "It's just the way I've always been. I'm not the most forthcoming type of person and I don't really open up and be myself until I've gotten to know someone a little better."

DBR: Is that because you're worried about peoples' perceptions of you then and does that bother you?

JD: "I don't worry about what people think of me really although I think maybe it has hindered me a little bit in certain areas of my life. At the end of the day I'm me and I am who I am. I think as you get a bit older you learn that more and you consider change but only if you really feel it will make you a better person. So in that respect there are areas in my life I know I need to be more open but then there are others where I like to keep them to myself."

"I've always tried to be honest with myself and people around me and never tried to be someone I'm not. If I don't really like someone for whatever reason I don't pretend to like them but I don't go out of my way to tell them that I don't either. I just keep myself to myself with stuff like that. If people don't like me I really don't give a sh*t! Having said that I don't think I've always opened myself up to let people get to know to me so maybe I should a little more." **>>**



of a somewhat disappointing result at the penultimate round of the series in Spain by Knight, in France it was a case of when, not if, Taddy would win the title.

The answer to that question comes soon enough. Winning the night's opening final it was a case of job done for Taddy, the now five-time FIM SuperEnduro champion. Thriving on the kind of pressure that would reduce many to a nervous wreck he confidently lined up for the night's first final with the win in his sights. And although he didn't lead from the start, he stuck to early pace-setter Mathias Bellino like glue, eventually seizing his chance and hitting the front.

Was it a surprise that Taddy clinched the 2014 SuperEnduro World Championship? Absolutely not. Nor was it a surprise that he didn't sit back and do 'just enough' to win, opting instead to win with a win. Taddy started the series as favourite, endured a few tough moments, but ultimately did what he and so many expected him to.

It wasn't a perfect championship from the Pole. But it was true Taddy. Digging deep and producing the goods, Blazusiak once again tucked another championship into his pocket having again showed himself to be too strong over the course of a championship.

Owain Humphreys battles it out in Tours



Knighter muscles the Sherco to second in the championship



SILVER SERVICE!

DK and Jonny Walker battle it out for second...

For Britain's leading indoor enduro racers David Knight and Jonny Walker the 2014 SuperEnduro series was one of mixed results, emotions, and performances. Unquestionably it was Knight who was the stronger and faster rider of the two during the opening rounds, with Jonny stepping up to perform best at the closing rounds. In some ways both riders failed to do what they'd set out to do – Knight beat Blazusiak and Walker beat Knight – but during the series both showed that Taddy is beatable.

Knighter started strong in Liverpool and got stronger, winning in Poland. With Taddy fighting back in Brazil David once again responded with a win in Mexico. It looked as if the title fight would go all the way to the last race of the championship. But the penultimate round of the series proved to be Knight's undoing. He didn't perform badly – he just didn't perform at his very best.

As Blazusiak claimed three wins in Barcelona, Knight finished off the podium for the first time in the series. It meant Taddy jumped ahead in

the title race. The title was effectively Taddy's. But David can be extremely pleased with what he achieved this winter. On new machinery and up against 'the man' Knighter showed that he's still capable of race wins.

Jonny Walker's SuperEnduro campaign didn't start brilliantly but as the races rolled by he got better and better. Points lost in the earlier rounds meant that there was no Brit-vs-Brit final round showdown for the championship's runner-up position, but during the final two events in Spain and France Jonny took significant strides forward in terms of performances and results.

Looking much more sure of himself and starting well while removing the costly mistakes that often hampered his progress at earlier events in Barcelona and then again in Tours Jonny delivered solid performances. At the final round in France he secured his much needed first win, and while he wasn't able to beat Knight he made sure that he kept 'the rest' behind him.

Husky pilot Alfredo Gomez



Jonny Walker takes third in the final standings



WONDER WOMAN!

SuperEnduro rookie Emma Bristow takes Women's title

The Women's class may have been only three rounds long but it was one of the most dramatic. Three different winners ensured nothing was certain and it wasn't until the drop of the final chequered flag that we eventually knew who the new champion was.

Against the odds, Emma Bristow became the first ever SuperEnduro Women's World Champion. Leading into France Jane Daniels had the advantage. Securing the race win at round two in Poland she held a five-point lead over Bristow. Ultimately, the title was hers to lose.

Taking the holeshot in the France, Bristow quickly checked out knowing that even if she won, she still needed a disaster from Daniels. Bristow got exactly that. Sitting in second for the majority of the race, Daniels appeared to have everything under control. But then a crash on the penultimate lap turned everything on its head. Wedged in the rock section Daniels slipped back to third and with time running out she couldn't recover. Ending the race in third she gifted the championship to Bristow. Crowned the 2014 SuperEnduro Women's World Champion, Bristow could hardly believe her luck.



Our first off-road world champion of the year is Emma Bristow



Jane Daniels is very unlucky not to take the title



Danny McCanney swaps machinery mid tour ending up on a Beta



MIXED BAG!

Danny McCanney's strange old season...

Danny McCanney joined Knight and Walker as 'the other' Brit to contest the majority of the season. Missing out on Brazil and Mexico, Danny delivered some strong rides during his first season out of the junior ranks.

As the 2013 SuperEnduro Junior champion McCanney dramatically split from long term stable Gas Gas weeks before round one in Liverpool. Ensuring he still made it to the start line, Fowlers Motorcycles stepped in with the loan of a KTM 250F.

Despite not riding four-stroke machinery for three years he acquitted himself well on one of the toughest and most technical tracks of the series. After qualifying for the SuperPole and going on to end the night with a top 10 overall result the Manxman had a lot to be pleased about.

Round two in Poland and now on Beta machinery, Danny carded his best result of the series. Off to a flyer in Final #1 he chased home Knight and Mathias Bellino for third place but with the rest of his classmates off to South America and McCanney forced to stay at home the Beta rider struggled to get back on pace when the series returned to Europe. With his best result of sixth coming during Final #2 in Barcelona, Danny frustratingly ended what started out to be a promising season in ninth overall.

THE DOZING GIANT

IS AMERICAN HONDA STILL THE MAIN POWERHOUSE OF AMA OFF-ROAD RACING? DBR SPOKE TO KEY PEOPLE AT THE HEART OF THE FACTORY OPERATION OUT OF TORRANCE IN CALIFORNIA TO FIND OUT

Words by Adam Wheeler Photos by Ray Archer

There are not too many teams or manufacturers in the AMA Supercross paddock with two huge, shiny semi-articulated trucks as part of their set-up. Honda, backed by Muscle Milk and with two very contrasting athletes in Justin Barcia and the absent Trey Canard is the most conspicuous.

If the famous brand is fondly remembered for its hefty investment in Grand Prix racing for several decades then the prestige easily extends to the USA where the likes of Bailey, Bayle, De Coster, Johnson, Carmichael and McGrath have all graced or honed the hallowed red bikes.

The factory team stands marginally taller than the copious effort by the Geico squad that has now also branched into 450SX/MX classes. Honda 'alley' is brilliantly red and black at each round of the SX series with the Troy Lee Designs unit also part of the logistics.

While Geico have chipped in with their fair share of race wins and titles in the 250 category in recent years it might be fair to say that the factory team are still waiting. Injuries to Canard, so fast but so fragile, for successive seasons have put the stopwatch on his time as a works-backed rider. Barcia, at 20 years old already a Honda stalwart, is curiously failing to get the best of the CRF450R and all that speed and aggression has only delivered one podium finish from half a season of supercross. During our time in California rumours were beginning that the former Lites Champion was looking to change brand for the first time.

On a wider scale Honda are also smarting after the defection of Chad Reed's Discount Tires TwoTwo Motorsports team to Kawasaki spurned a brief career resurrection and two wins for the Aussie after a miserable term on the CRF in 2013.

Is this merely the cyclical dry-spell that all teams experience in racing? Is Honda chasing their tails with the last two incarnations of the CRF450R? Subjective



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RECORD BREAKER!

WITH A FOURTH STRAIGHT HELL'S GATE
VICTORY GRAHAM JARVIS MAKES A WINNING
START TO HIS 2014 HARD ENDURO SEASON

Words and photos by Future 7 Media



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